ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

For

JOBS IN THE WOODS RESTORATION PROJECT

(Road Decommissioning)

United States
Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management
Medford District

Jackson County, Oregon

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR
JOBS IN THE WOODS – RESTORATION PROJECT
(Road Decommissioning)

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT

JACKSON COUNTY OREGON
EA COVER SHEET

RESOURCE AREA: Ashland

ACTION/TITLE: Jobs In The Woods – Restoration Project (Road Decommissioning)

EA NUMBER: OR-116-04-02

LOCATION: T. 39 S., R. 4 W., in sections 29 and 30, W.M., Jackson County Oregon (Maps 1)

List of Preparers	Title	Responsibility
John Samuelson	Forest Engineer	Team Lead
Brad Tong	Botanist	Special Status Plants, Botany
Ted Hass	Soils Scientist	Soils
George Arnold	Wildlife Biologist	T&E Animals, Wildlife
Chris Volpe	Fisheries Biologist	Fisheries, Riparian
Laurie Lindell	Hydrologist	Hydrology & Watershed
Fred Tomlins	Recreation Specialist	Cultural Resources
Kristi Mastrofini	Environmental Coordinator	NEPA Compliance

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
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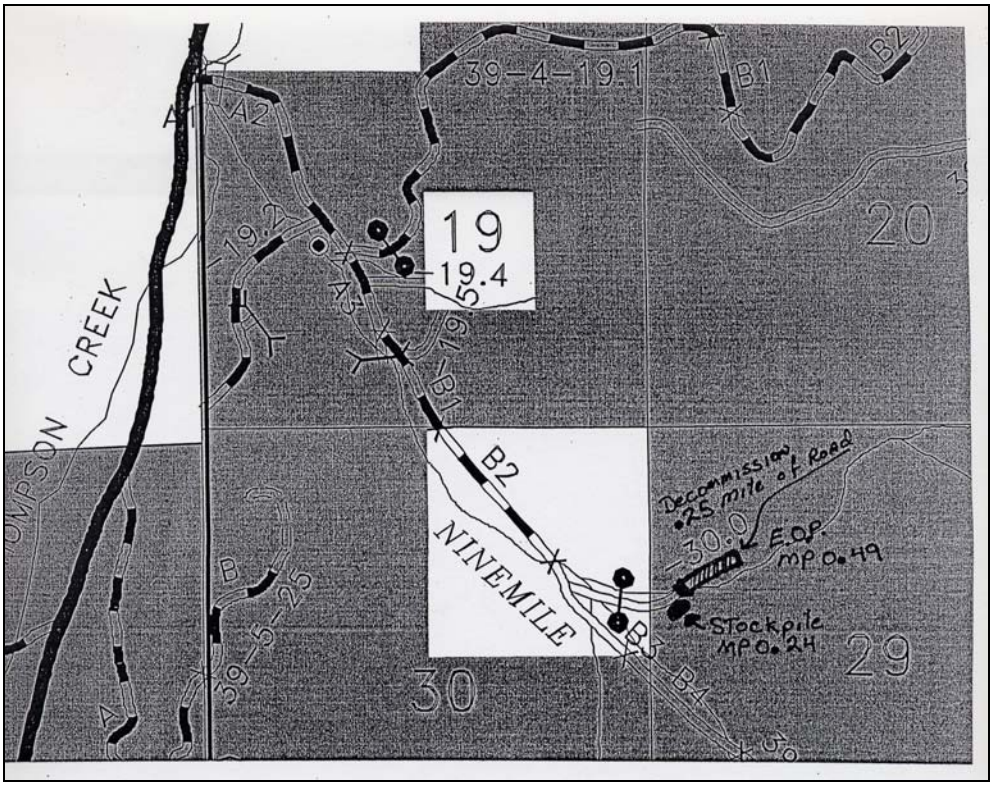
A. WHAT IS BLM PROPOSING?

The Ashland Resource Area of the Medford District BLM proposes to decommission an estimated 0.25 miles of road located on BLM administered lands.

B. WHERE IS THE PROJECT LOCATED?

The road segment (about 0.25 mile in length) is located in the Thompson Creek Watershed; the legal description is T. 39 S., R. 4 W., in sections 29 and 30, W.M., Jackson County Oregon (Map 2).

Map 1. Project Area



C. WHY IS BLM PROPOSING THIS PROJECT?

Medford District's Resource Management Plan provides Management Actions/Direction for closing stabilizing or obliterating roads based on their ongoing potential effects to Aquatic Conservation Strategy and Riparian Reserve Objectives while considering short and long-term transportation needs. Based on anticipated resource management and public access needs anticipated at this time, the road segment identified for decommissioning is no longer needed. The road was used historically to access a mining claim that has since been terminated. The road segment is located within a Riparian Reserve. There is a need to decommission the road to reduce road related impacts to the affected Riparian Reserves and to eliminate the cost of

maintaining roads that are no longer needed. Over the long-term, road decommissioning would contribute towards improving watershed conditions consistent with Medford District BLM Resource Management Plan and the Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives.

D. DECISIONS TO BE MADE

The Ashland Resource Area Field Manager must decide whether to implement the Proposed Action as designed or whether to select the No-Action Alternative. The decision will also include a determination whether or not the impacts of the proposed action are significant to the human environment and whether an Environmental Impact Statement must be prepared before the Manager makes a decision.

E. MANAGEMENT DIRECTION AND RELATIONSHIP TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS, AND OTHER PLANS

The above project has been reviewed and found to be in conformance with the *Medford District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan* as amended by the March 22, 2004 *Record of Decision to Remove or Modify the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines in Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl, and by the Record of Decision Amending Resource Management Plans for Seven Bureau of Land Management Districts and Land and Resource Management Plans for Nineteen National Forests within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl to Clarify Provisions Relating to the Aquatic Conservation Strategy.* The Medford District Resource Management Plan incorporated the *Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl.*

The proposed action and alternatives are in conformance with the direction given for the management of public lands in the Medford District by the Oregon and California Lands Act of 1937 (O&C Act), Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the Clean Water Act.

F. ALTERNATIVES ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY

Mechanical Decommissioning: Mechanical decommissioning of the road was originally considered to accelerate restoration by reducing compaction and disturbing the bed to encourage the establishment of vegetation and trees on the road bed. This alternative was eliminated from detailed study for the following reasons: 1) the graveled portion of the road is preventing sediment delivery to the stream from the road bed; 2) the natural surface portion of the road bed has naturally re-vegetated and with minimal erosion occurring with no sedimentation reaching the stream. Therefore, allowing the road to decommission naturally would avoid contributing a source of sedimentation that could occur from new disturbance.

G. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

1. Alternative 1 - No Action Alternative

Under the "no action" alternative, the road would not be decommissioned; the road would continue to be managed under BLM's current road management policy. No maintenance would occur unless offsite damage is discovered. The road segment is located behind a BLM controlled gate, which is successfully controlling unauthorized traffic at this time.

2. Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

Under Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, approximately 0.25 mile of road would be naturally decommissioned. A barricade would be installed in a manner that would eliminate vehicle travel on the decommissioned segment of road.

A culvert providing the current stream crossing would be pulled. The stream crossing would be re-established to the natural stream gradient and valley form. Streamside slopes would be reestablished to natural contours.

Project Design Features

1. During construction operations, water in the stream would be diverted around the work area in a manner (e.g. a pipe or lined ditch) that would minimize stream sedimentation. The contractor would be required to submit a water diversion plan to BLM for approval prior to beginning instream work. This project design feature would be waved if the stream were found to be dry at the time work begins. The Contractor would be responsible for meeting all State and Federal requirements for maintaining water quality.

2. Road fill material would be pulled back with the streamside slopes reestablished to natural contours.

3. Excess excavated fill material would be removed from the stream crossing area and placed in a stable location.

4. Native riparian tree species, including both hardwoods and conifers, would be planted to speed up recovery time.

5. Movement of sediment downstream from the worksite would be minimized through the use of filtering materials such as straw bales or coconut fiber logs/bales.

6. Streambanks at the crossing would be stabilized as soon as possible following culvert removal and exposed soils would be seeded, mulched, and planted with native riparian tree species.

7. Refuel power equipment, or use absorbent pads for immobile equipment, at least 150 feet from water bodies, to prevent the direct delivery of contaminants into a water body (or as far as possible from a water body depending on site conditions.

8. Develop and implement an approved spill containment plan that is in accordance with Oregon Department of Environmental Quality requirements.

9. Culvert removal work would occur during dry weather conditions generally late summer to early fall to best avoid wet conditions.

10. All in-channel work would be done during the summer low-flow period.

11. Follow ODFW guidelines for timing of in-water work, where relevant, except where the potential for greater damage to water quality and fish habitat exists.

12. Project must meet applicable terms and conditions to implement reasonable and prudent

measures #10 from the Programmatic Biological and Conference Opinion.

13. To minimize the spread of noxious weeds:
    a. Vehicle and equipment use off existing roads in the project area would be limited to the dry season.
    b. Mechanical equipment would be power washed and cleaned of all soil and vegetative material before entering the project area
    c. Seeding of native grasses and/or an approved seed mix on highly disturbed soil (e.g., re-contoured slopes, temporary equipment access roads, etc.) would occur.
    d. Noxious weed populations in the project area would be treated prior to ground disturbing activity with subsequent treatments occurring as necessary and as funding is available.

H. EFFECTS OF IMPLEMENTATION

1. Soil and Water Resources

The soil identified in the culvert removal area is Abegg gravelly loam, 2 to 7 percent slopes. This very deep, well drained soil is on alluvial fans. It formed in alluvium derived dominantly from metamorphic rock. The elevation is 1,000 to 2,500 feet.

Typically, the surface is covered with a layer of needles, leaves, and twigs about ½ inch thick. The surface layer is very dark grayish brown gravelly loam about 5 inches thick. The next layer is very dark grayish brown and brown very gravelly loam about 17 inches thick. The upper 16 inches of the subsoil is dark yellowish brown extremely gravelly loam. The lower 28 inches is brown and yellowish brown extremely gravelly clay loam. The depth to bedrock is 60 inches or more. In some areas the surface layer is cobbly or stony.

Permeability is moderate in the Abegg soil. Available water capacity is about 4 inches. The effective rooting depth is 60 inches or more. Runoff is slow, and the hazard of water erosion is slight.

The road segment proposed for decommissioning is within a Riparian Reserve and crosses an unnamed perennial tributary to Ninemile Creek in the Thompson Creek Subwatershed. Thompson Creek from mile 0 to 3.9 is the only stream segment in this subwatershed that is included on the Department of Environmental Quality's 303(d) list of water quality limited streams. The listing is for dissolved oxygen and the listed segment is more than five miles downstream from the proposed action.

The stream reach that includes the road crossing has an average bankfull width of six feet and an average bankfull depth of 0.8 feet. The stream gradient through this reach is approximately five percent. This channel reach has been heavily mined in the past and the resultant channel is deeply incised with no access to the floodplain. Streamflow is subsurface in portions of this stream reach. The existing road crossing consists of three culverts and there is some undercutting below the culverts. The stream channel and riparian area for this reach are rated as nonfunctional.

The segment of road proposed for decommissioning and culvert is rocked and in good condition. The road is stable and not contributing sediment to the nearby stream. A natural surface road built by a miner extends beyond the rocked portion to the north and south section line of sections 29 and 20 respectively (T. 39 S., R. 4 W., W.M.). This road section is also in good condition

with vegetation growing in the center of the road. A small portion of the unsurfaced road is rutted, but no sediment is moving offsite.

Alternative 1 - No-Action: Under Alternative 1, the road would continue to be managed under BLM's current road management policy. No maintenance would occur unless offsite damage is discovered. It is unlikely that the undersized culverts would be replaced because the road is no longer needed for access. The culverts would continue to be at risk of failing during high flow events which could potentially cause local channel scour and deliver sediment to the Ninemile Creek stream system.

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action: The proposed action would follow through with a Middle Applegate Watershed Analysis (USDI 1995) water quality recommendation to decommission roads, especially in Riparian Reserves. The proposed action would decommission 0.25 mile of a road that is no longer needed as part of the transportation system. The proposed road decommissioning project would involve: removal of the three culverts located at the crossing of the unnamed Ninemile Creek tributary; restoring the stream crossing to the natural stream gradient and valley form; reestablishing streamside slopes to the natural contour; removing the excavated fill material and placing it in a stable location; establishing native vegetation on the disturbed area; and barricading the decommissioned road segment.

Alternative 2 would have no direct or indirect effect on dissolved oxygen in the 303(d) listed portion of Thompson Creek. Removing the culverts would have a small, localized direct effect on summer stream temperature in the unnamed tributary to Ninemile Creek. The stream segment that is currently flowing through the culverts would be exposed to solar radiation when the culverts are removed. Because the stream has an east/west orientation at the stream crossing, only the vegetation on the south side provides shading (USDA and USDI 2004). Streamside vegetation adjacent to the stream crossing may be damaged during the culvert removal, slightly enlarging the exposed opening. The total length of exposed stream would be less than 25 feet. The stream crossing would not be shaded until vegetation becomes established. Native riparian tree species, including both hardwoods and conifers, would be planted to speed up recovery time. Any increase in stream temperature at the proposed project site would not likely reach the mainstem of Ninemile Creek, which is 0.28 mile downstream from the proposed culvert removal. The long-term benefit of riparian vegetation replacing the road stream crossing would be greater than the short-term loss of stream shading.

Adverse sediment impacts to the unnamed tributary to Ninemile Creek would be minimized through Best Management Practices (see Proposed Action Description).

The in-channel work associated with the culvert removal portion of the decommissioning project could result in localized, short-term (limited duration) turbidity/sediment increases. Any turbidity and sediment increases resulting from the road decommissioning work under Alternative 2 would be within the scope of the increases analyzed in the Medford District PRMP/EIS (USDI 1994, p. 4-18, 4-19).

The primary sediment delivery mechanism resulting from the culvert removal would be streambank erosion during bankfull flows following completion of instream work. The project design features and best management practices would minimize the potential for streambank erosion. Streambank erosion resulting from the culvert removal would continue to occur during successive bankfull events until vegetation becomes sufficiently established to protect the banks. It could take up to two winters for the streambanks to stabilize after the culvert removal. In general, the long term benefits of decommissioning the road outweigh the relatively short term,

localized, small sediment pulse that may be in introduced in the unnamed Ninemile Creek tributary.

If care is taken in the removal of the culverts, minimal soil disturbance would occur. Impacts associated with the culvert removal are mostly related to the creek channel and are adequately addressed in the water resource section.

2. Fish

The proposed action is located within the Middle Applegate River Watershed, specifically the Ninemile Creek drainage (Thompson Creek subwatershed). The proposed road decommissioning and culvert removal would occur adjacent to and within the stream channel of a small fish bearing tributary (unnamed) to Ninemile Creek. The unnamed tributary supports a population of cutthroat trout to river mile 0.5 (this is upstream of the location of the culvert proposed to be removed). Ninemile Creek contains spawning and rearing habitat for threatened Southern Oregon/Northern California (SONC) coho salmon, winter and summer steelhead, and cutthroat trout. Ninemile Creek is considered both Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and Coho Critical Habitat (CCH) by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (fisheries) (NOAA fisheries). The location of the proposed project is less than 1/3rd of a mile from occupied CCH and EFH in Ninemile Creek.

Alternative 1 - No Action: The No-Action alternative has been determined to have "*no effect*" to SONC coho salmon, CCH, or EFH in Ninemile Creek. Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives (USDA/USDI 1994, p. 2-5) will not be negatively impacted at the watershed scale under this alternative.

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action: As outlined in the Programmatic Biological and Conference Opinion (NOAA Fisheries 2001) for road decommissioning, the proposed action has been determined to "*likely adversely affect (LAA)*" SONC coho salmon, CCH, and EFH in Ninemile Creek. The programmatic Biological and Conference Opinion defines LAA actions for culvert work as those within Riparian Reserves that would likely result in ground disturbance with sediment delivery mechanisms to stream channels. Also any instream work.
Removal of the culvert would likely cause a short term pulse of fine sediments into the unnamed tributary. Given the short distance of the project location to occupied CCH (less than 1/3rd of a mile), it is likely that some sediment would impact habitat in Ninemile Creek. Impacts would likely be of short duration, and affect only a few pools (juvenile salmonid rearing habitat).

Direct effects to juvenile salmonids include reduced opportunities to feed and perhaps avoidance of disturbed areas altogether as a result of increased turbidity. Indirect effects include habitat modification of pools should a layer of fine sediment be deposited over the substrate. This can lead to decreased production of aquatic macro-invertebrates, and hence a reduction in food supply to juvenile salmonids. Adherence to Project Design Features and Best Management Practices as described under Alternatives, Proposed Action, should help to minimize these sediment related impacts.

Long term affects of this project would be beneficial to fish populations and habitat. Connectivity to upstream habitats in the unnamed tributary would improve as a result of the culvert removal. Decommissioning of the short road segment would reduce future potential for road related erosion and sediment inputs into the stream network as well. Project Design Features outlined under Alternatives, Proposed Action, are consistent with Standards and Guidelines for road management within Riparian Reserves.

3. Wildlife (Terrestrial)

Alternative 1 - No Action: Under the "no action" alternative, the road would not be decommissioned; the road would continue to be managed under BLM's current road management policy. No maintenance would occur unless offsite damage is discovered. If future maintenance occurred, those animals present in the immediate vicinity of the operations would be subject to short-term disturbance; however, this would be a minor impact. There would be no disturbance to habitat or animals from road decommissioning or culvert removal operations.

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action: Habitat immediately adjacent to the culverts to be removed will be degraded or removed during culvert removal. Because only a small amount of habitat will be affected, and because much of the habitat will reestablish after the culverts are gone, the impact to terrestrial wildlife habitat will be minor.

Those animals present in the immediate vicinity of the operations will be subject to short-term disturbance; however, this will be a minor impact. Decommissioning the roads will have a long-term benefit to wildlife by decreasing vehicular traffic, and the vegetation that will reestablish on the roadbed will provide additional habitat.

Suitable habitat for proposed or listed threatened/endangered species will not be affected by the proposed project.

4. Special Status Botanical Species

Alternative 1 - No Action: Under the "no action" alternative, the road would not be decommissioned; the road would continue to be managed under BLM's current road management policy. No maintenance would occur unless offsite damage is discovered. If future road maintenance occurred, the road prism or previously disturbed ground (from culvert removal) does not provide suitable habitat for BLM Special Status Plants and Fungi. Actions occurring within the road prism or in previously disturbed ground would have no effect on BLM Special Status Plants and Fungi, including those listed or proposed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action: The road prism or previously disturbed ground (from culvert removal) does not provide suitable habitat for BLM Special Status Plants and Fungi. Actions occurring within the road prism or in previously disturbed ground would have no effect on BLM Special Status Plants and Fungi, including those listed or proposed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.

5. Invasive, Nonnative Species

Alternative 1 – No-Action: Under the "no action" alternative, the road would not be decommissioned; the road would continue to be managed under BLM's current road management policy. No maintenance would occur unless offsite damage is discovered. Future road maintenance could leave disturbed soil along the road bed that would favor nonnative plant species.

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action: The proposed project would leave expose disturbed mineral soil. This will provide an environment that favors invasive nonnative plant species. Seeding and weed treatment, by project design, would prevent subsequent noxious weed establishment.

Project Design Features for equipment washing would reduce potential sources of invasive species.

6. Cultural Resources

The road segment proposed for decommissioning is located in an area that was surveyed for cultural resources under contract. The road location was reviewed by a BLM cultural resource specialist and it was determined that no known cultural resources would be impacted by the No Action or Proposed Action Alternatives.

7. Critical Elements

The following elements of the human environment are subject to requirements specified in statute, regulation, or executive order and must be considered in all EAs.

Critical Element	Affected Yes	Affected No	Critical Element	Affected Yes	Affected No
Air Quality		**X**	T & E Species		**X**
ACECs		**X**	Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		**X**
Cultural Resources		**X**	Water Quality		**X****
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		**X**	Wetlands/Riparian Zones		**X****
Floodplains		**X****	Wild & Scenic Rivers		**X**
Nat. Amer. Rel. Concerns		**X**	Wilderness		**X**
Invasive, Nonnative Species		**X***	Energy Resources (EO 13212)		**X**
			Environmental Justice		**X**

*These affected critical elements could be impacted by the implementing the Proposed Action. Impacts are being avoided by project design.

**These affected critical elements would be impacted by implementing the Proposed Action. The impacts are being reduced by designing the Proposed Action with Best Management Practices, Management Action/Direction, Standard and Guidelines as outlined in the Environmental Impact Statements (EIS)/Record of Decisions *(RMP) (USDI BLM 1995(a))(USDA FS; USDI BLM 1994*) tiered to in Chapter 1. The impacts are not affected beyond those already analyzed by the above-mentioned documents.

I. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public notice of the availability of this EA was provided through advertisement in Medford's *Mail Tribune* newspaper. A copy of this EA is available upon request from the Ashland Resource Area, Bureau of Land Management, 3040 Biddle Rd., Medford, OR 97540, (541)618-2384.

This EA was distributed to the following agencies, organizations, and tribes:

Organizations and Agencies
Association of O&C Counties
Audubon Society
Jackson County Stockmen's Association
Headwaters
Jackson County Commissioners
Jackson Co. Soil and Water Conservation District
Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center
Applegate River Watershed Council
Northwest Environmental Defense Center
Oregon Department Forestry
Oregon Natural Resources Council
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Rogue River National Forest (RRNF)
The Pacific Rivers Council
Southern Oregon University
Southern Oregon Timber Industries

Federally Recognized Tribes
Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Indians
Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde
Confederated Tribes of Siletz
Klamath Tribe
Quartz Valley Indian Reservation (Shasta Tribe)
Shasta Nation

Other Tribes
Confederated Bands [Shasta], Shasta Upper Klamath Indians
Confederated Tribes of the Rogue-table Rock and Associated Tribes

References Cited

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. 1994. *Record of Decision (ROD) for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and the Standards and Guidelines for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl*. Portland, OR.

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USDA, USDI, USDC. 2001. *Biological Assessment for Programmatic USDA ForestService and USDI Bureau of Land Management Activities Affecting Oregon Coast Steelhead Trout, Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast and Oregon Coast Coho Salmon, Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast and Oregon Coast Chinook Salmon within the Southwestern Oregon Province, Oregon*.

U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Medford District Office. 1994. *Medford District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*. Medford, OR.

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U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Medford District. 1995(b). *Middle Applegate Watershed Analysis,* Version 1.3. Medford, OR.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management. 2004. *Draft Sufficiency Analysis for Stream Temperature*. Portland, OR.